

## The Biblical Feasts – 2

### Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Day of First Fruits

By Rufus Barnes



The second Biblical Feast mentioned in Leviticus 23 is Passover, which is linked to the Feast of Unleavened Bread and an often overlooked Feast, the Day of First Fruits, not to be confused with the Feast of First Fruits which occurs 50 days later and which will be examined in my next article.

Passover celebrates God's redemption of His people Israel and their deliverance from the hand of Pharaoh in Egypt when the first born of all non-Jewish families perished in the tenth plague sent by God. As we shall see, it is also central to Christianity and the story of Easter.

Every year Jewish families and many Christians, including biennially at St Mary's, mark Passover with a special dinner called a Seder using an order of service known as Haggadah – literally the 'telling' – during which the Exodus story is played out. It is this Seder that Jesus shared with His disciples at what Christians refer to as the Last Supper.

At the Seder those present share specially blessed unleavened bread and four glasses, or cups, of wine. The bread is unleavened because God requires leaven to be removed from each home prior to Passover, leaven being a picture of sin. The four cups of wine are, in order, the Cup of Sanctification, the Cup of Affliction, the Cup of Redemption and the Cup of Acceptance. Jesus used the sharing of the unleavened bread and the Cup of Redemption to establish what we call Holy Communion or the Eucharist. The unleavened, or sinless bread and the wine of Passover are His perfect Body and Blood shed for us and for our sins.

The Bible tells us (1 Corinthians 5 vv 6-8) that Jesus died as the Passover lamb for us. There were strict rules that applied to Passover lambs. They had to be born in the vicinity of Bethlehem, where they were tended by shepherds whose job it was to breed lambs especially for Passover. They also had to be perfect and to check that this was the case they were examined carefully in the days before Passover to exclude those with any imperfections. Is it not amazing that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, that He was visited as a baby by the very shepherds whose job it was to raise Passover lambs and that he was interrogated by the Chief Priests before Passover and nothing in His teachings was found wanting. He qualified to be the Passover lamb!

Perhaps even more amazing is that in the Seder there is a time when part of the unleavened bread is broken and then hidden. This piece is known as the afikomen which translates to

'that which is to come'. Later in the Seder the afikomen is searched for and dramatically 'found'. The requirements of the unleavened bread used at a Jewish Seder are that it must have no leaven (in line with our picture, it is sinless), to be absolutely sure that there is no leaven and the bread cannot rise, each piece must be thoroughly pierced and striped – a picture of Jesus! Thus in the very heart of each Jewish Passover Seder is hidden the Messiah for whom the Jewish people continue to long and whom we recognise as Jesus.

Jesus died on the cross on the 14<sup>th</sup> of the Jewish month of Nisan, was buried and rose on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, which would have been the Sunday morning. The 16<sup>th</sup> of Nisan is the Day of First Fruits (Leviticus 23 vv9 – 14). Paul tells us that Jesus rose from the dead as the first fruits of those who have died. He goes on to say that through Jesus – the first fruit of resurrection life – all who believe in Him will indeed have resurrection life (1 Corinthians 15 vv 20 – 23).

Just as Jesus is the fulfilment of Passover – He died once for all – so, in His resurrection, He is the fulfilment of the Feast of the Day of First Fruits.

### **Rufus Barnes – April 2020**

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